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**New Genealogies and the Courage of Truth: Toward an  
Ethics of Adversarial Public Educational Scholarship and  
Policy Activism**

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**Abstract:** Science denial in the post-truth era is driven by both the rejection of empirical science and the fraudulent use of scientific language. Education policy based on junk science produced by philanthrocapitalists depoliticizes political questions by relocating complex legislative and policy issues from the realm of political and philosophical

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discourse to that of scientific rationality using metrics and methods that are themselves fatally flawed. Dominant configurations of institutional power also attack scholarship that both debunks spurious causal claims and establishes causal links to existential crises, which in both cases inconveniences the neoliberal capitalist project. We discuss the methodological implications of education research as the counter-conduct of policy advocacy against power claims based on both the rejection of empirical science and the production of junk science. We both discuss and model Foucault's tactic of genealogy and his analysis of *parrhēsia*, or truth telling, through creating an imperfect, preliminary genealogy of the "new" post-truth era, which contextualizes contemporary technologies of alternative facts in the history of public relations and propaganda that extend to the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. The methodological and political tactic of genealogy could be a move toward a new ethics of adversarial public scholarship that seeks to reconfigure what counts as scholarship in academia, itself a rationalizing disciplinary institution. Considering the moment, the study of power, the academy's roles both in subverting and perpetuating it, and the necessity of epistemological and methodological counter-conduct have perhaps never been more important.

**Keywords:** post-truth; propaganda; public relations; neoliberalism; Foucault; genealogy; truth-telling; qualitative research methods

### **Nuevas genealogías y el valor de la verdad: Una ética de la erudición educativa pública contradictoria y el activismo político**

**Resumen:** La negación de la ciencia en la era de la posverdad es motivado tanto por el rechazo de la ciencia empírica como por el uso fraudulento del lenguaje científico. La política educativa basada en la ciencia basura producida por los filantropocapitalistas despolitiza las preguntas políticas por reubicar asuntos legislativos y políticos complejos desde el reino del discurso político y filosófico a la racionalidad científica usando métricas y métodos que son fatalmente fallidos. Las configuraciones dominantes del poder institucional también atacan a la educación, que tanto desmienten afirmaciones causales falsas como establece vínculos causales con la crisis existencial, lo que en ambos casos interrumpe el proyecto capitalista neoliberal. Discutimos las implicaciones metodológicas de los estudios en educación como la conducta contra las demandas de poder basadas en tanto el rechazo de la ciencia empírica como en la producción de la ciencia no deseada. Ambos discutimos y modelamos la táctica de genealogía de Foucault y su análisis de *parrhēsia*, o decir la verdad, mediante la creación de una genealogía imperfecta y preliminar de la "nueva" era de la posverdad que contextualiza tecnologías contemporáneas de hechos alternativos en la historia de las relaciones públicas y propaganda que se extiende hasta principios del siglo 20. La táctica metodológica y política de la genealogía podría ser un movimiento hacia una nueva ética de la erudición pública adversaria que busca reconfigurar lo que cuenta como educación académica, en sí misma una institución disciplinaria racionalizadora. Considerando el momento, el estudio del poder, las funciones de la academia tanto para interrumpirlo como para perpetuarlo, y la necesidad de una conducta epistemológica y metodológica tal vez nunca ha sido más importante.

**Palabras-clave:** posverdad; propaganda; relaciones públicas; neoliberalismo; Foucault; genealogía; diciendo la verdad; métodos de investigación cualitativa

## Novas genealogias e a coragem da verdade: Uma ética do conhecimento educacional adversarial e do ativismo político

**Resumo:** A negação da ciência na era pós-verdade é impulsionada tanto pela rejeição da ciência empírica quanto pelo uso falacioso da linguagem científica. A política de educação baseada na suposta ciência produzida pelos filantropocapitalistas despolitiza as questões políticas ao realocar complexas questões legislativas e políticas do domínio do discurso político e filosófico para o da racionalidade científica, usando métricas e métodos que são eles mesmos inevitavelmente falhos. As configurações dominantes de poder institucional também atacam a ciência que tanto desacredita afirmações causais espúrias quanto estabelece elos causais a crises existenciais que, em ambos os casos, perturbam o projeto capitalista neoliberal. Discutimos as implicações metodológicas da pesquisa em educação como a contra-conduta da defesa de políticas contra as alegações de poder com base tanto na rejeição da ciência empírica quanto na produção de ciência falaciosa. Discutimos e modelamos a tática de genealogia de Foucault bem como sua análise da *parrhêsia*, ou do dizer a verdade, através da criação de uma genealogia preliminar imperfeita da “nova” era pós-verdade, que contextualiza tecnologias contemporâneas de fatos alternativos na história das relações públicas e propaganda que se estende até o início do século XX. A tática metodológica e política da genealogia poderia ser um movimento em direção a uma nova ética de conhecimento público paralelo que busca reconfigurar o que conta como conhecimento na academia, ela mesma uma instituição disciplinadora e racional. Considerando o momento atual, o estudo do poder, o papel da academia tanto subvertendo quanto perpetuando o poder, e a necessidade de uma contra-conduta epistemológica e metodológica talvez nunca tenham sido tão importantes.

**Palavras-chave:** pós-verdade; propaganda; relações públicas; neoliberalismo; Foucault; genealogia; dizer a verdade; métodos de pesquisa qualitativa

## New Genealogies and the Courage of Truth: Toward an Ethics of Adversarial Public Educational Scholarship and Policy Activism

*On February 14, 2018, 19-year-old Nikolas Cruz murdered 17 people and wounded 17 more at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Florida. National Rifle Association-backed politicians and policymakers offered thoughts and prayers, and they admonished the nation that the aftermath of the massacre wasn't the right time to talk about gun legislation. Student survivors, in contrast, organized marches and walkouts that resulted in a nationwide day of protest on March 14, exactly one month after the atrocity. Senior Emma Gonzalez stood in front of the Broward County Courthouse to “call B.S.” on politicians who refuse to enact gun legislation, and she and others confronted members of the state legislature at the Florida State Capitol. Irrational and conspiracy-driven gun advocates and their agents provocateur circulated rumors that some of the students were “crisis actors.” The actions of the students of Parkland illustrate the struggle for and embodiment of the courage of truth in a post-truth age.*

The 2016 election of Donald Trump as President of the United States has introduced a new “post-truth” era. The systematic removal of the words “climate change” and the deletion of climate change data from federal Websites (Davenport, 2018) illustrate the Trump Administration’s hubristic dismissal of empirical scientific findings that inconvenience the unsustainable neoliberal capitalist fantasy of unlimited growth. In the wake of the devastation of Houston and Puerto Rico by Hurricanes Harvey, Irma, and Maria, corporate media have failed to substantively discuss how

human activity contributes to the climate breakdown that has led to increasingly severe tropical storms and other destructive weather patterns (Monbiot, 2017). The lexicon of “alternative facts,” science denial, and tawdry monumentalist historiography—“make America great again”—has so thoroughly permeated American public discourses that the Oxford Dictionary (n.d.) selected “post-truth,” defined as an adjective “relating to or denoting circumstances in which objective facts are less influential in shaping public opinion than appeals to emotion and personal belief,” as its 2016 word of the year.

Yet the association of “post-truth” solely with Trump’s election obfuscates the deeper history of both the concept and its underlying conditions of possibility. The Oxford Dictionary (n.d.) traces the first use of the term “post-truth” to a 1992 essay published in *The Nation* by the late American playwright Steve Tesich. Reflecting on events like the Iran-Contra scandal and the 1991 U.S. war against Iraq, Tesich (1992) suggested to his fellow Americans:

We are rapidly becoming prototypes of a people that totalitarian monsters could only drool about in their dreams. All the dictators up to now have had to work hard at suppressing the truth. We, by our actions, are saying that this is no longer necessary, that we have acquired a spiritual mechanism that can denude truth of any significance. In a very fundamental way we, as a free people, have freely decided that we want to live in some post-truth world. (p. 13)

Tesich (1992) understood that educative spaces exist everywhere, and he proposed that the lessons many Americans have learned for decades through public curricula and pedagogies of denuded truth have enthralled them to the tempting “mirage of ourselves as a military superpower” (p. 14).

Prophetically, Tesich (1992) also concluded that awaiting us on the other side of that mirage would be a “monster with a human face...to inform us with whom we have been collaborating” (p. 14).

Pithy, Orwellian post-truth terminology like “fake news,” “alternative facts,” and “Make America great again” associated with Trump’s brief presidency have, on the one hand, coalesced the most repugnant historical forces that exist in the US—heteropatriarchy, white supremacy, settler-colonialism, gender and sexual violence, xenophobia, class war, ecocide, militarism, anti-intellectualism, religio-apocalyptic chauvinism—into a cohesive political movement. The words and symbols deployed by Trump and his propagandists fascistically appeal to feelings and emotions that denigrate intellect, rationality, empathy, and critical reflection on one’s own partial assumptions, beliefs, and understandings of the self and the social world. On the other hand, Trump has also precipitated a still-evolving popular opposition movement, embodied most visibly in large women’s marches that have become an annual occurrence since Trump’s inauguration. That movement is also embodied in the actions of the children of Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School who survived a terrorist attack and were the first to speak truth to power. The understandable visceral reaction against the post-truth violence inherent in the rhetoric and actions unleashed by Trump and his supporters, however, begs a crucial question: What were the conditions of possibility that culminated in the current “post-truth” moment?

In this paper, we undertake a preliminary, imperfect genealogy of the post-truth phenomenon tied to Trump’s election from a concern that some post-truth critiques may succumb to an ahistoric presentism (Pinar, 2012) in which analyses of “new” patterns of subjective and social behavior obfuscate or ignore complex historical linkages. Our brief inquiry comprises a synoptic analysis (Jay, 1988) through which we weave together our discussion in paraphrastic dialogue with various interlocutors. We discuss Foucault’s (2003) method of genealogy and his analysis of *parrhēsia*, or “free-spokenness” (2011), as a move toward an ethics of adversarial public scholarship and as a political tactic to subvert the post-truth policyscape. Borrowing from the contemporary ethic of

adversarial journalism, traceable to the early Progressive era, we discuss some methodological implications of adversarial genealogical education scholarship. Such a scholarly orientation might subvert truth/power claims that produce legislation and public policy in an “evidence-free zone” that lacks the support of empirical research and contravenes the public will (Lafer, 2017, p. 131). Trump’s election illustrates the importance of public scholarship and academic conduct to counter our current post-truth nightmare by historicizing its conditions of possibility. We connect current post-truth tactics and signifiers like “alternative facts,” science denial, perverted historical narratives, and militaristic appeals to patriotism with the evolution of increasingly sophisticated propaganda and public relations techniques that originated in the United States during the early 20th century (Bernays, 1923, 1928/2005, 1935, 1947; Ewen, 1996; Lippmann, 1922/1997, 1927/1993).

Post-truth, currently imbricated with a brutal neoliberal corporate masculinity (Connell, 2012) and exemplified in Trump’s zero-sum game of “winning at all costs,” illustrates an obscene hyper-individualist pursuit of “more” predicated on a nihilistic impulse to conquer that runs deep in the structure of the slaveholding, settler-colonial United States. The quest for truth is an unsettling historical journey that requires us, as Baldwin (1965/1998) suggests, to face, with “great pain and terror,” (p. 723) our past. Adversarial genealogical scholarship might write new histories of the present (Foucault, 1977/1995) and demonstrate an ethos that “the subjective and the social” are “embedded in and reciprocally constitutive of the other,” an ethic through which “I—alone and in solidarity with others—undertake political action in the world” (Pinar, 2011, p. 32).

After much reflection on our evolving, imperfect understanding of the historical workings of power, genealogy as a research method and a political tactic, and qualitative research methods in and against the post-truth times in which we live, we have chosen to frame our work in terms of new genealogical forms of adversarial research and advocacy for several reasons. Much as Foucault (2007) found terms like “resistance” and “dissidence” inadequate compared to his historical tracing of the emergence of various counter-conducts against institutional power, we find academic terminology such as “critical” and “critique” similarly problematic. In using the term “adversarial,” we are aware of its common connotation of conflict and even violence. But in the context of the tactic of genealogy and Cynic *parrhēsia*, which we discuss below, we use the term “adversarial” to reflect the embodiment of personal and social struggle to reconstruct our understanding of ourselves, others, and the social world and active engagement against increasingly grave and violent injustices being perpetrated by various institutions against many different peoples, species, and the planet itself. Adversarial research might counter academic inquiry predicated on a logic of extraction that “ignores the question of truth even as it lacks the means to take a stand in relation to the production of truth” (Kuntz, 2015, p. 33) and the “damage-centered” (Tuck, 2009) research prized by the academy as an enterprise of neoliberal commodification. Through the creation of new genealogies, which excavate subjugated knowledge and wisdom traditions that have been purposefully written out of the academic narrative (Foucault, 2003), adversarial scholarship might reform curricular and pedagogical spaces through which self and social reconstruction can occur (Pinar, 2012). Finally, we are concerned that some discourses of “critique” may be in danger of becoming, or may have become, precisely the totalizing institutionalized narratives that the tactic of genealogy subverts. What, for example, constitutes legitimate critique? From what perspective(s) and in what lexicon is a critical discourse institutionally acceptable? Pinar (2011) further notes the potential “unaddressed I” of ideology critique in which critics might fail to see themselves in the very systems they/we critique. We are still struggling with these concerns, but we raise them in the spirit of honest dialogue, self-understanding, and the reconstruction of ourselves, our institutions, and our world as more just and humane.

## The Tactic of Genealogy

The tactic of genealogy traces the production of regimes of veridiction, or regimes of truth, and the historical moments when those regimes attain the political significance to effect power:

I think that what is currently politically important is to determine the regime of veridiction established at a given moment. ... This is the point, in fact, where historical analysis may have a political significance. It is not so much the history of the true or the history of the false as the history of veridiction which has a political significance. (Foucault, 2008, p. 36)

Genealogy, as scholarly inquiry and a political tactic, reveals the historical linkages to processes that effect power as institutional knowledges and subjectify through the “compulsory extraction of truth.” (Foucault, 2007, p. 185). Modern institutions have developed increasingly sophisticated “political technologies of the body” (Foucault, 1977/1995, p. 26) to create docile, governable populations. Those tactics include: panoptic surveillance; statistical techniques through which to classify, hierarchize, label, and produce the “norm” and the “delinquent”; the arrangement of bodies in institutions that habituate a compliant, self-governing subjectivity; and insidious public relations and media technologies (Ewen, 1996; Foucault 1970/1994, 1977/1995).

Genealogical scholarship and political action occur through localized insurrections of “subjugated knowledges” against totalizing discourses like neoliberalism (Foucault, 2003, p. 7). The “local character of critique” rejects totalizing institutional theories and political ideologies that inhibit, discredit, and marginalize local ways of knowing and being (Foucault, 2003, p. 6). The return of subjugated knowledges comprised of “historical contents that have been buried or masked in functional coherences or formal systematizations” (Foucault, 2003, pp. 6-7) contribute to localized insurrectionist discourses:

It is thanks to the reappearance of these knowledges: the knowledge of the psychiatrized, the patient, the nurse, the doctor, that is parallel to, marginal to, medical knowledge, the knowledge of the delinquent, what I would call, if you like, what people know... it is the reappearance of what people know at a local level, of these disqualified knowledges, that made the critique possible. (Foucault, 2003, pp. 7-8)

In the current post-truth era, as in previous times of denuded truth, local knowledges of the incarcerated, the Indigenous, refugees, children, women, queer communities, the impoverished, and communities of color form, individually and in solidarity, the lexicon of reconstruction. Local insurrections of knowledge, for example Black Lives Matter and Standing Rock, can be genealogically connected with global systems of colonization, militarism, capitalism, and heteropatriarchal white supremacy that affect many other local communities. Those shared narratives might form relationships of political solidarity through which broad coalitions subvert oppressive totalizing systems and reconfigure power as more just and humane. Juxtaposing “erudite knowledge and what people know” at the local level illustrates that “the historical knowledge of struggles” is at stake in any era of denuded truth:

We can give the name “genealogy” to this coupling together of scholarly erudition and local memories, which allows us to constitute a historical knowledge of struggles and to make use of that knowledge in contemporary tactics. (Foucault, 2003, pp. 8-9)

Genealogies question power-laden institutional truth claims, reveal which knowledges have been disqualified, which have been privileged, and whose voices have been marginalized to enable

desubjugated knowledges “to oppose and struggle against the coercion” of unitary discourses (Foucault, 2003, p. 10). The excavation of subjugated local knowledges through scholarly inquiry that historicizes regimes of truth—such as neoliberal capitalism—is integral to understanding and contesting power claims predicated on denuded truth.

### **A Preliminary Genealogy of Post-Truth**

As in the current post-truth era, Ewen (1996) notes that at the turn of the 20th century in the US, the concept of truth was contested. William James saw truth as “profoundly unstable” and “susceptible to the processes and judgments of ongoing social verification” (Ewen, 1996, p. 40). Then, as now, the US and the world had been engulfed in social, political, and economic upheavals. The Civil War, industrialization, urbanization, racial and class conflict, imperialism, and rapacious capitalism precipitated adversarial “muckraking” journalism that questioned sacrosanct truths such as “free enterprise” that the working and middle classes found predatory (Ewen, 1996). The term “publicity” that emerged through the writings of Progressive journalists like Henry George and Henry Demarest Lloyd and authors like Mark Twain and Upton Sinclair initially connoted “a crystalline light by which an unraveling society and its toxic contradictions might be illuminated and brought to order,” which starkly contrasts its present association with “mendacious cunning” (Ewen, 1996, p. 48).

Initially, Progressive authors, journalists, social scientists, intellectuals, and others viewed the public as the literate, engaged population that formed the basis of democratic life and social reconstruction and thought disseminating facts about corruption and brutal economic conditions could “ignite a movement for social reform” (Ewen, 1996, p. 50). Quickly, however, “publicity” became a technique through which to “engineer” (Bernays, 1947) or “manufacture” (Lippmann, 1922/1997) public consent. Lippmann (1922/1997) prophetically explains:

The creation of consent is not a new art. It is a very old one which was supposed to have died out with the appearance of democracy. But it has not died out. It has, in fact, improved enormously in technic, because it is now based on analysis rather than on rule of thumb. And so, as a result of psychological research, coupled with the modern means of communication, the practice of democracy has turned a corner. A revolution is taking place, infinitely more significant than any shifting of economic power. Within the life of the generation now in control of affairs, persuasion has become a self-conscious art and a regular organ of popular government. None of us begins to understand the consequences, but it is no daring prophecy to say that the knowledge of how to create consent will alter every political calculation and modify every political premise. (p. 158)

Lippmann (1922/1997) further expressed contempt for a public he viewed as neither capable of nor interested in governing itself, redefined democracy as a society administered by an expert elite, and created a rigid dichotomous epistemological distinction between truth and opinion:

Truth, as he [Lippmann] conceived it, grew out of disinterested scientific inquiry; everything else was ideology. The scope of public debate accordingly had to be severely restricted. At best public debate was a disagreeable necessity—not the very essence of democracy but its “primary defect,” which arose only because “exact knowledge,” unfortunately, was in limited supply. Ideally public debate would not take place at all; decisions would be based on scientific “standards of measurement” alone....Lippmann had forgotten what he learned (or should have learned) from

William James and John Dewey: that our search for reliable information is itself guided by the questions that arise during arguments about a given course of action. It is only by subjecting our preferences and projects to the test of debate that we come to understand what we know and what we still need to learn. (Lasch, 1996, pp. 169-170)

Lippmann's (1922/1997) redefinition of democracy coincided with the redefinition of the public that mattered to the liberal elite and media: the middle class that could afford to buy and had time to read newspapers and magazines. Progressive publicity turned relatively quickly into the media genre with which we are currently familiar: sensationalist tabloid journalism (Ewen, 1996). The commodification of the Progressive conscience marked a turn in tactics through which media could profit from lurid exposés of social ills, a practice now commonly described as "poverty porn." Mass-circulation journalism during the early 20th century held significant consequences for the Progressive view of the public and for truth:

Here, at the fateful crossroads joining mass-circulation journalism with the atomized and anxious middle-class readership, a conception of truth predicated on rational public discourse encountered another manner of truth, one confirmed...by graphic overtures to private emotion. (Ewen, 1996, p. 59)

The early promise of Progressive journalism to stir mass action prior to World War I, through its descent into a spectacle-driven consumer good, produced a "new public" defined by its "isolation and spectatorship" (Ewen, 1996, p. 59). As a tactic of governmentality—the institutionalized knowledges and techniques of social rationalization through which modern nation-states create docile subjects and governable populations (Foucault, 2007)—intellectuals like Bernays, Creel, and Lippmann recognized, and in the cases of Bernays and Creel, pioneered increasingly sophisticated mass media technologies and public relations techniques to manufacture news and create and manipulate various publics. Bernays (1923) even created a new figure, the "public relations counsel," whose role lie in interpreting clients' interests to the public, which these counsels were able to accomplish by interpreting "the public to the client" (p. 51). Underlying the journalistic turn were elite fears of mass revolt against the prevailing corporate-state power structure predicated on class-based notions of free enterprise capitalism, private property, and the accumulation of wealth:

Images of the people ruling were, for Lippmann, assuming an air of menace. Ongoing middle-class hostility toward big business once understood as a constructive catalyst for social reform had now become, to Lippmann's increasingly conservative mind, an inadvertent stimulus of social disintegration. As attacks on the practices of big business mounted and an increasingly militant working-class movement challenged the very concept of privately held wealth, Lippmann became more and more alarmed. (Ewen, 1996, p. 61)

Edward Bernays, one of the chief architects of American propaganda and public relations techniques throughout the 20th century, saw the emerging social sciences, particularly Le Bon's (1896/2002) analysis of the crowd mind, his cousin Freud's theories of psychoanalysis, and new forms of media as essential to "the engineering of consent" (Bernays, 1947). Along with figures like Progressive journalist George Creel and Lippmann, the engineers of consent focused on "the public" to study, create, and manipulate mass opinion by producing regimes of truth. Lippmann (1927/1993) starkly expressed the elitist contempt for the public that these "executive men" sought to mobilize to serve the interests of militarism, capitalism, and corporate-state power. Lippmann



(1927/1993) conflated capitalism with democracy and denigrated the public as “spectators of action” (p. 93) who must be put in their place “so that each of us may live free of the trampling and the roar of a bewildered herd” (p. 145).

Lippmann (1927/1993) expressed the prevailing angst of political and economic elites about potential social upheaval related to long-simmering populist resentment of predatory corporate behavior and concentrations of power and wealth. Early adversarial progressive journalism had exposed the abuses of corporate power, political corruption and graft, and the abysmal conditions of the working class, which moved the working class, and for a time, the middle class, to action in support of organized labor, women’s suffrage, and political and economic reforms. Ironically, one of those early progressive journalists, George Creel, a “conspicuous critic of big business—and of pro-business propaganda” (Ewen, 1996, p. 110)—was recruited by President Wilson as the civilian head of the Committee on Public Information (CPI), Wilson’s propaganda bureau that sought to mold public opinion to support the United States’ entry into World War I. American public sentiment about entry into Europe’s war was deeply negative, and Wilson’s use of Creel, who developed progressive credibility as an anti-corporate journalist, marked a turn among the liberal elite that both feared social upheaval and believed their own social engineering hubris:

In 1917, with one of their own—Woodrow Wilson—at the helm of government, many saw the war as an opportunity for America and American liberal values to frame the world’s future....As a generation of Progressives united around the war effort in 1917, many believed that the war—and its triumphal aftermath—would place the United States in an incomparable position to deliver on its timeworn pledge of prosperity for the many. (Ewen, 1996, p. 110).

Wilson and many sympathetic liberal elites were, in reality, embodying the settler-colonial “Manifest Destiny” ethos on which the United States was built, now on a globalizing scale that has haunted the country, and the world, ever since. The problem of engineering consent for Progressive elites was a problem of governmentality, which resonates with Foucault’s (2007) analysis of the emergence of nation-states with national populations that must be ordered and governed to, in biopolitical terms, develop the state’s forces and secure the state itself. Modern states cannot govern solely through power as sovereign violence but must use rationalizing institutions to effect power, as Lippmann (1927/1993) and Bernays (1947) explicitly wrote, through institutionalized regimes of truth.

Institutions like the CPI, which Creel called “The House of Truth” (Ewen, 1996, p. 111), refined existing strategies and tactics to guide the mass mind, created news on a 24-hour basis, developed overseas news outlets, used emerging media to sell the war like any other consumer product, and pioneered models of publicity based on imagery, symbols, and “catch phrases” rather than extended text (Ewen, 1996). And what of the role of academics? Foucault’s (1970/1994) analysis of the emergence of the human sciences generated critical questions about the modern view of human beings as subjects of inquiry and objects of power predicated on institutionalized knowledges. To what extent could the social sciences make the same claims to objective reality that the natural sciences did, and to what political ends? The CPI leveraged the public perception of academics as speaking with authorial voices and engaged academics to write “authoritative pamphlets” in support of U.S. entry into the war (Ewen, 1996). Thus, the CPI functioned in a general economy of power to develop techniques through which emerging media could create overlapping technological assemblages that directed public discourses by producing a regime of truth around American bellicosity and extracting that truth continuously from the population.

## The Ebbs and Flows of Truth

The evolution of public relations as regimes of truth is a history of the contestation of power. Early Progressive journalism gave way to the CPI's manipulation of the population during World War I, which flipped back to more progressive populist concerns in the wake of the Great Depression that resulted in significant corporate moderation through welfare capitalism—pensions, health care, and other social benefits (Ewen, 1996). During the economically prosperous 1950s and the rise of television, the specter of the public as a spectatorial mass reappeared, only to be countered again by the “public ultimatums” of the 1960s (Ewen, 1996, p. 402). Populist backlashes against corporate-state power formed in the Civil Rights, Women's Rights, and environmental movements, the anti-war movement, and the questioning of consumer culture (Ewen, 1996). Corporate-state power, again on the defensive, doubled-down on the use of public opinion techniques to disaggregate the population into “discrete analytical units, an instrumental array of ‘lifestyles’ or ‘subcultures’ to be studied, and once studied, predictably governed” (Ewen, 1996, p. 405). Demography's subversion of democracy formed a system of governmentality through which power delivers to different groups messages they want to hear and summons opinions and generates “messages that exacerbate hostilities between groups, heighten the prejudices of particular sectors of the population, and contribute to an increasingly fragmented—and hence more manageable—society” (Ewen, 1996, p. 406).

## Post Truth Today

Trump's election and the newest iteration of post-truth associated with his administration may signal the arrival of the “monster with a human face” of whom Tesich (1992) warned. Trump's election also illustrates the culmination, thus far, of a “continual sideshow” and “masquerade of democracy” (Ewen, 1996, p. 410) that has historically afflicted U.S. politics, although arguably rarely to this degree. Trump's post-truth “catch phrases”—“fake news,” “alternative facts,” “build that wall,” “fire and fury”—that display an explicit contempt for empirical facts, science, and legitimate policy questions and political dissent are more boorish examples of the divide and conquer tactics that have long underpinned American public discourses. It seems to us that to understand and subvert this post-truth moment, we must ask ourselves, as public scholars and as citizens, some difficult questions and continue to connect the dots for ourselves and for the public (Goodall, 2010).

What, for example, is the substantive difference between Kellyanne Conway's defense of outright lies with “alternative facts” or Trump's “fake news” mantra and the biggest alternative fact-driven fake news of the last two decades: weapons of mass destruction? What is the substantive difference between Trump's Islamophobic crusade and the imprisonment of Japanese and Japanese-Americans by Franklin Roosevelt or Andrew Jackson's American Indian removal policies? What is the substantive difference between Trump's bellicose threats against North Korea and Iran to ensure American security and Wilson's war marketing pitch “make the world safe for democracy” or nearly every other military escapade over the last 100 years? What is the substantive difference between the “too big to fail” marketing tactic that “legitimized” the public bailout of the financial industry in the wake of the 2008 economic collapse and corporate PR that sought to rehabilitate the image of predatory corporations like Rockefeller's Standard Oil?

Specific to education policy, the crisis of public values (Giroux, 2012) that has evolved from the conservative (Powell, 1971) and liberal internationalist (Crozier, Huntington, & Watanuki, 1975) backlash against the “excess of democracy” (Crozier, et al., 1975, p. 162) of the 1960s mirrors early 20th century elite angst about a social upheaval that might result in more equitable and just reconfigurations of power. In what became the hegemonic discourse of neoliberalism since the

1970s (Harvey, 2005), education policy has come under particularly vicious assault because so much activism occurred in educational institutions. Powell (1971) urged the U.S. Chamber of Commerce to use its control over economic resources to create a public relations infrastructure, including academia, to, as Bernays (1923) wrote, crystallize public opinion in favor of free-enterprise, particularly through demographic fragmentation (Ewen, 1996). Likewise, “school choice” discourses owe much to Milton Friedman’s (1955) opposition to the “indiscriminate extension of governmental responsibility” over education and the “difficult to justify... ‘nationalization,’ as it were, of the bulk of the ‘education industry’” (p. 14). Neoliberal education policy must be understood in that genealogical context.

The neoliberal cooptation of the political system, including the judiciary, at the national and more importantly the state level, has culminated in a policyscape on which education legislation and policy emerges in a post-truth evidence-free zone (Lafer, 2017). Post-truth education policy relies on selling a punitive alternative facts-based narrative historically deployed against public education: education is the institution singularly responsible for ameliorating every social problem; selfish, inept unionized teachers cannot be trusted; public education is failing; only those outside the education establishment can hold educational institutions accountable (Kumashiro, 2008, 2012; Pinar, 2006, 2012). In an institutional assemblage of power that would make Bernays proud, evidence-free education legislation and policy is marketed to the public through both science denial and a perverted discourse of science. The exceptionally American distrust of and contempt for intellectuals (Hofstadter, 1962) creates a fertile field of intelligibility that manifests in “curriculum” that rejects empirical science, such as climate breakdown denial, and attempts to legitimate teleology in the form of “intelligent design,” which presents itself as a scientific research program.

Science denial and perverted discourses of “research” that underlie regimes of truth such as audit culture and coercive accountability (Shore & Wright, 1999, 2000; Taubman, 2009) form a utilitarian symbiosis by which foundations and think tanks produce a genre of alternative facts-based junk science. Corporate-sponsored “research” reports, policy briefs, and model legislation trace their genealogy to Bernays and his public relations techniques to sell a policy agenda in which the philanthrocapitalists who fund the “research”—Ravitch’s (2010) billionaire boys club comprised of the likes of Gates, the Waltons, Broad, and Hastings—usually have a direct financial interest. Just as Lippmann regarded public debate as the primary defect of democracy (Lasch, 1996), current post-truth discourses depoliticize inherently political questions of being and truth by relocating them to a fictive hyperpluralized realm of alternative facts in which facts don’t even matter. In such a nihilistic milieu, the regime of truth that defines being an “effective” teacher, for example, relies on fatally flawed causal claims associated with value-added measurement (Amrein-Beardsley, 2014; Berliner, 2014). Those claims remove the subjective and contingent aspects of education from the realm of political and philosophical discourses by applying the patina of objectivity and scientific rationality to effect normalizing power through the bodies of teachers and students. Simultaneously, dominant configurations of institutional power attack scholars and scholarship that debunks spurious truth claims that inconvenience the neoliberal capitalist project. Current post-truth discourses do not exist outside historical context. We have been here before, but as a society, we have succumbed to a historical amnesia that short-circuits the self and social reconstruction necessary to resuscitate the unfinished, perhaps moribund, democratic project. How might we public scholars work toward something better?

## Becoming Outcasts: The Courage of Truth in a Post-Truth Age

Adversarial genealogical scholarship relentlessly seeks truth in a post-truth age, which as Monbiot (2017) suggests, calls us to question everything. To question foundational beliefs in free enterprise, the social philosophy of neoliberalism (MacLean, 2017), and capitalism can render us outcasts in our own corporatized institutions. As scholars, we regard the systematic and continuous testing of truth claims as the highest form of empiricism. As citizens and public intellectuals who embody commitments to justice, the sustainability of all life, a truly inclusive demos, and the reconstruction of ourselves and the social world, we regard our public scholarship and conduct as the highest form of political empiricism by systematically and continuously testing the regimes of truth—in the present case, post-truth—through which politicians, policymakers, and the educational establishment claim the authority to effect political power.

As Foucault (2007) historically traced revolts of conduct against the medieval European Christian pastorate and then against emerging nation-states, he used the term “counter-conduct” to convey active, intentional “struggle against the processes implemented for conducting others” (p. 201)—regimes of truth. It seems that the dangerous act of questioning in a post-truth era is itself an important and politically adversarial form of counter-conduct, and in the post-truth era of #resistance, we might be mindful of the historic limitations of terms like resistance, dissent, and dissidence:

There is a process of sanctification or hero worship which does not seem to me of much use. On the other hand, by using the word counter-conduct, and so without having to give a sacred status to this or that person as a dissident, we can no doubt analyze the components in the way in which someone actually acts in the very general field of politics or in the very general field of power relations; it makes it possible to pick out the dimension or component of counter-conduct that may well be found in fact in delinquents, mad people, and patients. (Foucault, 2007, p. 202)

Like Pinar’s (2006, 2012) reconceptualization of curriculum as complicated conversation that enacts a model of the public sphere in which we both explain ourselves and listen to others, Lasch (1996) suggests:

It is the act of articulating and defending our views that lifts them out of the category of “opinions,” gives them shape and definition, and makes it possible for others to recognize them as a description of their own experience as well. In short, we come to know our own minds only by explaining ourselves to others. The attempt to bring others around to our own point of view carries the risk, of course, that we may adopt their point of view instead. We have to enter imaginatively into our opponents’ arguments, if only for the purpose of refuting them, and we may end up being persuaded by those we sought to persuade. Argument is risky and unpredictable, therefore educational. (pp. 170-171)

It seems to us that Pinar (2006, 2012), Lasch (1996), and Foucault (2011) indeed articulate an ethics of democratic empiricism predicated on erudite scholarship and what people know (Foucault, 2003). We qualitative researchers embody the courage of truth by sharing with each other the best information and understanding we currently have about issues important to all humanity. We explain our conclusions, listen to the arguments of others, test the credibility of our own work by anticipating how we might be wrong, look for alternative explanations, and are prepared to be wrong. In describing genealogies as “antisciences,” Foucault (2003) might be criticized as having

contributed to our descent into the current post-truth nightmare. Yet close reading indicates that genealogies are not insurrections “against the contents, methods, or concepts of a science” but “an insurrection against the centralizing power-effects that are bound up with the institutionalization and workings of any scientific discourse organized in a society such as ours” (Foucault, 2003, pp. 8-9). Foucault (2003), like Lasch (1996), argued against the abuses of the social sciences through which certain knowledges, experiences, and wisdom traditions are marginalized or erased precisely to produce partial regimes of truth and effect governmental power.

The science denial, “alternative facts,” and production of pseudoscientific discourses that characterize our current post-truth dystopia have habituated in many an imperviousness to exactly the sense of empirical struggle—the testing of one’s deepest-held beliefs—that Foucault (2011), Pinar (2006), Lasch (1996) and others have proposed underlies the search for truth as self and social understanding. And the techniques associated with creating a post-truth world are imbricated with the hegemony of neoliberalism, particularly the property rights supremacist social philosophy disguised as “public choice” economics promoted by “libertarian” ideologues (MacLean, 2017). Neoliberal logics of audit culture, new managerialism, public-sector austerity, and the financialization, economization, and marketization of every aspect of our work and lives—see Foucault’s (2008) *homo aeconomic* entrepreneur of the self—have become largely accepted as common sense in academia (Shore & Wright, 1999, 2000; Taubman, 2009).

In the neoliberal era, social crises like the current opioid epidemic, which has claimed more than 200,000 American lives over the last two decades (Meier, 2018), further complicate discourses around scientific truth. For example, Purdue Pharma, with U.S. Food and Drug Administration approval, began to market OxyContin in the mid-1990s as less addictive and less prone to abuse than other opioids. Purdue did so, however, despite empirical evidence, concealed by the company, that the drug was being sought by those addicted to opioids because OxyContin is a higher-level narcotic than other shorter-acting painkillers (Meier, 2018). Thus, Purdue Pharma, like the oil and tobacco companies before it, concealed scientific evidence of the deleterious effects of its product to extract profits from the public, which includes the subsidies granted to the company by the public health system in dealing with the crisis the company knowingly caused. Adversarial investigative journalism, particularly that of Barry Meier over two decades, uncovered Purdue’s malfeasance, but the company, despite several criminal investigations, has used its profits to settle cases with the federal government as a cost of doing business. The neoliberal reconfiguration of the political and judicial systems (MacLean, 2017) has prioritized corporate personhood and the upward redistribution of public funds to private hands, largely through the creation and manipulation of crises (Harvey, 2005, Klein, 2007) and rendered it increasingly difficult for the public to evaluate scientific truth claims upon which political decisions are being made.

An ethic of adversarial scholarship, which borrows from early Progressive journalism and a resurgence of independent journalism in the post-truth era, entails myriad risks. Goodall (2010) suggests that research in an age of mounting authoritarianism is largely a narrative struggle, and the risk we take in doing adversarial public scholarship is “the price of having let things go on badly for so long” (p. 36). We therefore turn to Foucault’s (2011) analysis of *parrhēsia*, or free-spokenness, as the embodiment of the courage of truth, which might contribute to the subversion of post-truth power claims in two ways. First, a *parrhēsiatic* scholarly ethic could open public dialogic spaces devoted to speaking and hearing our subjective truths—Pinar’s (2012) complicated conversation—an essential disposition of democratic citizenship. Second, adversarial scholarship, like adversarial journalism, might radically question, subvert, and discredit institutional power claims based on post-truth tactics like science denial and the attempt to legitimize totalizing discourses like neoliberalism by those who claim that the benefits of radical privatization are objectively provable. In this

historical moment, genealogical, adversarial, and accessible studies of power are crucial to the subversion of empirically unsupported, and often unsupportable, post-truth power claims.

In his final series of lectures, Foucault (2011) discussed the ancient Cynic practice of *parrhēsia* as the embodiment of the courage of truth in a social milieu in which the true life had been obfuscated by the vain ornamentation of material desires. In the context of governmentality, we consider *parrhēsia* a form of counter-conduct against oppressive regimes of (post-)truth. *Parrhēsia* is a form of truth-telling in which one gives an account of oneself in public dialogue with others. Qualitative research as *parrhēsiatic* genealogical inquiry will forefront our subjective positions and abiding concerns, and in doing so, scholars will practice an ethic of care for ourselves and for all humanity by giving a public accounting of ourselves through our work and embodying truth as a way of knowing-being (Foucault, 2011).

As we undertake *parrhēsiatic* genealogical insurrections of knowledge, we, acknowledging our own partial and perhaps erroneous understandings of ourselves and the world, must remain mindful of three touchstones discerned by Foucault (2011). First, our genealogies will embody an ethic of “telling the truth without concealment, reserve, empty manner of speech, or rhetorical ornament which might encode or hide it” (Foucault, 2011, p. 10). Second, speaking truth is a consequential act, which binds us to the truths we speak (Foucault, 2011). Third, we must accept the risks inherent in engaging in *parrhēsiatic* dialogues in which we may anger others or be confronted with the “hurtful truth” that our own beliefs and assumptions are partial or wrong (Foucault, 2011, p. 13). *Parrhēsia* is therefore a “way of being which is akin to a virtue, a mode of action” (Foucault, 2011, p. 25) rather than rhetorical technique that conceals our true meaning. Foucault (2011) proffers *parrhēsia* as an engagement in dialogue through which we speak our subjective truths and listen to the subjective truths of others with the intention of negotiating a better, yet always contingent and evolving understanding of ourselves, others, and the world.

Cynic *parrhēsia* also reflects four common ancient philosophical principles: preparation for life; care of the self in order to care for all humanity; study of what is useful for existence; and authenticating the principles one formulates as true “by the way one lives” (Foucault, 2011, pp. 238-239). A fifth principle unique to the Cynics is “change the value of the currency,” which reflects an understanding that one can “handle one’s own existence, take care of oneself as something real, and have the true currency of one’s true existence in one’s hands on condition that one knows oneself” (Foucault, 2011, pp. 241-242). Study and dialogue with others is an essential space in which we alter the value of our currency in terms of our subjective reconstruction, self and social understanding, and the embodiment of truth through which we put our “true currency with its true value into circulation” in the world (Foucault, 2011, p. 244).

### No Answers, Just Possibilities

Academics might embody *parrhēsiatic* strategies by refusing to deliver the damage-centered research demanded by the heteropatriarchal settler-colonial academy (Tuck, 2009). New genealogies can resurrect institutionally subjugated knowledges and work intentionally to counter the ahistorical, “flattened, never-ending ‘now’” (Pinar, 2012, p. 227) endemic in our public discourses. Further, the excavation of subjugated knowledges, particularly associated with epistemologies of the Global South (Connell, 2014), can expose oppressive geopolitical assumptions embedded in the social theories of the Global North. In the context of neoliberal globalization, topics such as settler-colonialism, militarism, human migration, climate breakdown, sustainability, and the persistent effects of coloniality and slavery add to the richness of understanding ourselves and others. Adversarial public genealogical scholarship might help negotiate the concerted backlash against

identity politics across the political spectrum, enacted through demographic techniques to divide and rule (Ewen, 1996), by which various groups, both in the US and throughout the world, can form new relationships of solidarity. Our work might also create public spaces in which to work through the trauma of discovering that our beliefs are partially or wholly untrue (Kumashiro, 2000).

Perhaps most importantly, those of us who dare to become outcasts must remain mindful of the danger of creating our own systems of governmentality that could descend into the disciplinary policing of the very difficult dialogues, long overdue and imbued with the “great pain and terror” of our individual and collective past (Baldwin, 1965/1998, p. 723), in which we as a society must engage. Our work and public conduct can model *parrhesiatic* practice to the public, primarily through the embodiment of a humble risking of our beliefs in dialogue with others rather than the hyper-masculinized hubris of certitude inherent in the post-truth world. We should also remain mindful of falling into the historic trap in which we, like liberal intellectuals of the past such as Lippmann and Creel, and many in the present, claim the authorial voice of the “expert” social engineer, which renders the public—Lippmann’s (1927/1993, p. 145) “bewildered herd”—superfluous to the demos.

Cynic *parrhesia*, particularly the embodiment of a public radically other life, resonates with an ethic of complicated conversation in which everyone is a participant in the public sphere whether narrating one’s truths or listening to others:

Explaining one’s point of view while working to understand others’ in dialogical encounters enacts a pedagogical model of the public sphere wherein social relationships become less combative, manipulative, and self-serving and, instead, more educational. (Pinar, 2006, p. 8)

Adversarial genealogies enacted through an ethic of care for the self and for all humanity (Foucault, 2011), are essential to working through a post-truth era characterized by rising authoritarianism and the threat of grave existential crises like climate breakdown and nuclear war. Adversarial public scholarship embodied as an ethic of care is a subjective and social practice dedicated to reconstruction of the self and the world. Adversarial genealogical scholarship that excavates other truths of being and knowing might open possibilities through which we reimagine ourselves and the world. Further, adversarial public scholarship, like early Progressive journalism, involves questions about not just regimes of truth, but of the ethical and social implications of our research. We suggest the pursuit of historicized scholarship through which to navigate the complex tensions between constructs of truth, opinion, belief, assumptions, and the importance of individual and social lived experiences—a weaving together of erudite scholarship and what people know (Foucault, 2003).

The term “adversarial journalism” in the Trump era seeks to hold power accountable without hiding behind a cloak of objectivity. Qualitative researchers, who have long been negotiating the tensions between discourses of objectivity and subjectivity, have worked to subvert untenable objectivist claims of power and to legitimize qualitative inquiry in academic institutions long predicated on discourses of objectivity. Nietzsche (1874/1997), writing of the trend toward creating an objective, neutral historiography sarcastically replied: “Objectivity and justice have nothing to do with one another. A historiography could be imagined which had in it not a drop of common empirical truth and yet could lay claim to the highest degree of objectivity” (p. 91)—this is the essence of post-truth. It seems to us that qualitative researchers have played an important political role in their work and their lives precisely by engaging in important dialogues of being-knowing and, as Foucault (2003) suggested, excavating local knowledges that had been buried by modern institutions, including the academy. That work has never been more important.

Becoming an outcast requires the embodiment of the courage of truth. Audre Lorde (1984), in her critique of the white, elite feminist establishment, wrote that survival is:

learning how to stand alone, unpopular and sometimes reviled, and how to make common cause with those others identified as outside the structures in order to define and seek a world in which we can all flourish....For the master's tools will never dismantle the master's house....And this fact is only threatening to those women who still define the master's house as their only source of support. (p. 112)

We have met the monster with a human face of whom Tesich (1992) warned, and it is us. To work through our current nightmarish iteration of American post-truth toward something better, we suggest engagement in complex, adversarial public dialogues structured around genealogies that reconstruct its conditions of possibility. This paper imperfectly pulls at one of the threads of post-truth, the history of propaganda and public relations, to begin a genealogy of the present in hopes of opening a dialogic space that might live beyond our preliminary analysis and through which we might reimagine the future. Venues like this special issue also create a complex interlocutory space in which we can engage in complicated conversation, understand the historicized present, and work toward the reconstruction of ourselves and the world.

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**SPECIAL ISSUE**  
**Rethinking Education Policy and Methodology in a Post-truth Era**

## education policy analysis archives

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